

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 04905

E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: EAIR, FR, UK, US

SUBJ: CIVAIR: FRENCH REACTION TO GISCARD-CARTER

EXCHANGE ON CONCORDE

1. INITIAL REACTION OF FRENCH TV EVENING FEB. 16
TO CARTER-GISCARD EXCHANGE OF CORRESPONDENCE ON
CONCORDE WAS ONE OF EFFUSIVE SATISFACTION, WITH
COMMENTARY TAKING ITS LEAD FROM UPBEAT STATEMENTS
MADE TO PRESS EARLIER IN THE DAY BY ELYSEE SPOKESMAN
FOLLOWING MEETING OF COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. "CONCORDE
IS NOW BEING DEALT WITH AT THE SUMMIT"... "CONCORDE
WILL BE THE TEST OF BETTER US-FRENCH RELATIONS"...
"CARTER IS PERSONALLY HANDLING THE AFFAIR"...
"PRESIDENT CARTER HAS DEFUSED THE AFFAIR ON THE EVE
OF THE NEW YORK COURT HEARING" --SO WENT THE
COMMENT ON THE TWO LEADING FRENCH TV CHANNELS.

2. FOLLOWING THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS' MEETING
(AND PRIOR TO RELEASE OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIQUE ON
THE EXCHANGE OF LETTERS LATER IN THE DAY), LECAT,
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PRESS SPOKESMAN AT THE ELYSEE, HAD INFORMED THE PRESS
OF THE EXCHANGE OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE TWO
PRESIDENTS. LECAT NOTED THE IMPORTANCE WHICH
GISCARD ATTACHES TO THE FUTURE OF THE FRENCH
AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AND TO CONCORDE'S ACCEPTANCE AT
NEW YORK. HE SAID GISCARD HAD MADE A NUMBER OF
"FIRM AND SOLEMN DEMARCHES" ON BEHALF OF CONCORDE.

LECAT IS QUOTED AS SAYING: "I CAN TELL YOU THAT FOR THE WHOLE RANGE OF PROBLEMS NOW UNDER STUDY BY FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES, THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC CANNOT HELP BUT NOTE THE VERY CLEAR DESIRE OF THE NEW AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION TO ESTABLISH CORDIAL RELATIONS WITH FRANCE. LASTLY, I CAN SAY THAT PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING AND PRESIDENT CARTER REMAIN IN VERY CLOSE CONTACT AS REGARDS THE CONCORDE AFFAIR AND AS FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS OCCUR I WILL BE IN A POSITION TO PROVIDE YOU WITH FURTHER DETAILS."

3. REACTION HAD SOURED A BIT BY THE FOLLOWING MORNING WHEN THE FRENCH PRESS AND RADIO HAD LEARNED OF QUALIFYING REMARKS MADE BY THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SPOKESMAN FOLLOWING US RELEASE OF THE COMMUNIQUE ON THE CARTER-GISCARD EXCHANGE. THE MAIN THEMES HEARD ON THE MORNING RADIO NEWS BROADCASTS WERE: "CARTER BLOWS HOT AND COLD"... "CARTER HESITATES"... "SITUATION REMAINS VERY CONFUSED"... "THE FRENCH BROKE OUT THE CHAMPAGNE TOO EARLY". BY AND LARGE, HOWEVER, RADIO COMMENTATORS STILL SAW BASIS FOR SOME SATISFACTION. HADN'T PRESIDENT CARTER, AFTER ALL, "DISAVOWED" "CANDIDATE" CARTER'S MORE NEGATIVE VIEWS ON CONCORDE? HADN'T PRESIDENT CARTER REAFFIRMED THE COLEMAN DECISION FOR THE SIXTEEN MONTH TRIAL PERIOD FOR CONCORDE, EVEN THOUGH HE FELT THAT IT HAD BEEN AN ERROR FOR THE FORD ADMINISTRATION TO HAVE ADOPTED THAT DECISION. IN SHORT, SOME CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM WAS VOICED OVER UNCLASSIFIED

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CONCORDE'S CHANCES AT NEW YORK AS A RESULT OF THIS LATEST DEVELOPMENT.

4. THE MORNING PRESS ECHOED THE SAME THEMES, AS IS EVIDENT FROM CAPTIONS TO THE PROMINENTLY FEATURED STORIES: "CONCORDE--CARTER HAS RESERVATIONS" (LE FIGARO); "CARTER: 'YES, BUT...'" (L'AURE, FRANCE-SOIR); "CARTER REPAYS GISCARD WITH KIND WORDS" (LE QUOTIDIEN); "CONCORDE" CARTER THROWS ALL HIS WEIGHT INTO THE BLANCE" (LES ECHOS). NOTING THAT PARIS AND WASHINGTON HAVE INTERPRETED THE CARTER-GISCARD EXCHANGE DIFFERENTLY WITH PARIS NATURALLY ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE, MOST NEWSPAPERS THEMSELVES CHOSE TO ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE. IN A FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL L'AURE SEES CONCORDE AS NOW HAVING DEFINITELY BECOME "AN AFFAIR OF STATE" IN RELATIONS BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE US. FOR L'AURE, PRESIDENT CARTER'S INFLUENCE IN DETERMINING NEW YORK'S DECISION IS SEEN AS STILL LIKELY TO BE PREPONDERANT,

AND "IN EXERTING DISCREET PRESSURE ON NEW YORK STATE

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AND AIRPORT AUTHORITIES MR. CARTER HAS TAKEN A POLITICAL
DECISION, NAMELY, TO GIVE PRIORITY TO SOLIDARITY WITH
EUROPEAN ALLIES." L'AUREOLE ALSO WRITES:
"OBVIOUSLY THE FRENCH AND THE BRITISH WOULD
INTERPRET A NEGATIVE DECISION (BY NEW YORK) NOT AS
AN ACT OF CAPITULATION BY A GOVERNOR TO PRESSURE
FROM ENVIRONMENTALISTS BUT AS A LOW BLOW GIVEN BY
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO THE FRENCH AND EUROPEAN
AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY TO PROTECT THE QUASI-MONOPOLY OF
AMERICAN WINGS IN THE WORLD." LE QUOTIDIEN'S FRONT
PAGE EDITORIAL AND ACCOMPANYING STORY ARE NOT AS
NEGATIVE AS THE HEADLINE MENTIONED ABOVE WOULD
SUGGEST; GISCARD IS SEEN AS HAVING WON AN IMPORTANT
CONCESSION IN PRESIDENT CARTER'S ENDORSEMENT OF THE
SIXTEEN MONTH TRIAL PERIOD FOR CONCORDE.

5. THERE IS ONE ESPECIALLY INTERESTING ASPECT
TO MEDIA REACTION, NAMELY, IT HAS NOW FINALLY BEEN
BROUGHT HOME TO THE FRENCH PRESS THAT PRESIDENT
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CARTER CANNOT DICTATE TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AT NEW YORK AND THAT THE FINAL DECISION WILL BE TAKEN BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES ALONE. THIS POINT CAME IN FOR PROMINENT MENTION IN TV AND RADIO COVERAGE AS WELL AS IN THE PRESS, THOUGH THERE WERE STILL SOME QUALIFYING RESERVATIONS. LE FIGARO, IN FACT, FOLLOWED ITS MAIN STORY WITH A SHORTER, EXCELLENT ARTICLE FROM ITS WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT ENTITLED "A PRESIDENT WHO DOESN'T HAVE ALL THE POWERS" WHICH OUTLINES SUCCINTLY THE CONCEPT OF SEPARATION OF POWERS UNDER OUR CONSTITUTION AND WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE.

6. THE COMMUNIST DAILY, L'HUMANITE, POINTS TO THE INITIAL EUPHORIA OF FRENCH MEDIA TO SUPPORT ITS CONTENTION THAT THE CARTER-GISCARD EXCHANGE WAS JUST ANOTHER "OPERATION BLUFF" MOUNTED BY THE GOF, DEMONSTRATING THAT THE GOF IS REALLY MORE CONCERNED WITH THE DOMESTIC PREELECTORAL SCENE THAN WITH THE FUTURE OF CONCORDE. L'HUMANITE DOUBTS THAT IT WAS JUST PURE CHANCE THAT ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CARTER-GISCARD EXCHANGE AS MADE THE VERY DAY CHIRAC HAD SCHEDULED HIS OWN PRESS CONFERENCE ON CONCORDE (SEE BELOW). IS NEW YORK REALLY THE SOURCE OF CONCORDE'S PROBLEMS, ASKS L'HUMANITE, WHICH IS INCLINED RATHER TO PLACE THE BLAME ON SUCCESSIVE FRENCH GOVERNMENTS BEGINNING WITH THAT OF CHABAN-DELMAS FOR HAVING "TORPEDOED" (COULE) THE CONCORDE PROJECT AND BROUGHT AEROSPATIALE TO ITS PRESENT SORRY CONDITION.

7. LE MONDE IN ITS ISSUE APPEARING ON THE AFTERNOON OF FEB. 17 CARRIES AN ARTICLE FROM ITS WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT HENRI PIERRE WHO SEES THE REMARKS OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SPOKESMAN AS HAVING REVEALED MCUH MORE THAN DID THE MESSAGE OF PRESIDENT CARTER THE "PERMANENT EMBARRASSMENT OF THE AMERICAN

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EXECUTIVE BRANCH AS REGARDS CONCORDE." PRESIDENT CARTER PROBABLY WOULD HAVE PREFERRED NOT TO HAVE TO TAKE A POSITION, WRITES PIERRE, BUT HE WAS PRESSURED INTO DOING SO BY THE RECENT "DIPLOMATIC FORCING" ENGAGED IN BY THE FRENCH AND BRITISH. DESPITE ITS ENCOURAGING TONE AND POSITIVE ASPECTS THE CARTER MESSAGE REALLY CHANGES NONE OF THE BASIC FACTS, WRITES PIERRE, WHO CONCLUDES BY NOTING THAT

THE WHITE HOUSE MUST BE EXTREMELY PRUDENT IN
BRINGING ANY PRESSURE TO BEAR ON NEW YORK AUTHORITIES
BECAUSE OF SENSITIVITY OVER STATES' RIGHTS.

8. IN A FEATURE STORY DISTRIBUTED LATE AFTERNOON
FEB. 17, AFP STRESSES THAT CONCORDE ISSUE HAS
DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS ON EACH SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC,
WHICH EXPLAINS THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS THAT ARISE ON
EITHER SIDE, E.G., A MATTER OF NATIONAL PRIDE AND
PRESTIGE FOR THE FRENCH AND BRITISH, A MATTER OF
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND SEPARATION OF POWERS
FOR THE AMERICANS. ARTICLE CONCLUDES THAT IF
CONCORDE CONTINUES TO BE SO CRITICAL AN ISSUE THAT
PRESIDENT CARTER IS COMPELLED RELUCTANTLY TO
INTERVENE WITH NEW YORK AUTHORITIES, USING PERHAPS
THE LEVERAGE OF FEDERAL AID FOR NEW YORK'S FINANCES,
THEN QUESTION IS WHAT PRICE, DIPLOMATICALLY SPEAKING,
FRENCH AND BRITISH MIGHT HAVE TO PAY FOR LANDING
RIGHTS FOR CONCORDE. THIS LEADS SOME OBSERVERS TO
WONDER, SAYS AFP, WHETHER IT WAS NOT AN ERROR AT
THE OUTSET TO PRETEND THAT CONCORDE'S SUCCESS

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DEPENDENT ALMOST ENTIRELY ON THE OBTAINING OF LANDING

RIGHTS WITHOUT FIRST ENSURING THAT THE PRICE FOR THIS WOULD NOT BE TOO HIGH. AMONG THE MORNING NEWSPAPERS LES ECHOS HAD REPORTED THERE WAS SOME SPECULATION THAT IN EXCHANGE FOR BEING AUTHORIZED TO SERVE NEW YORK AIR FRANCE AND BRITISH AIRWAYS MIGHT BE ASKED TO LIMIT CONCORDE SERVE TO ONLY ONE OR TWO FLIGHTS A DAY PER CARRIER.

9. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CARTER-GISCARD EXCHANGE DID INDEED STEAL THE THUNDER OF THE RPR, WHICH WENT AHEAD ON THE AFTERNOON OF FEB. 16 WITH ITS ALREADY ONCE POSTPONED CHIRAC/TURCAT PRESS CONFERENCE ON CONCORDE (PARIS 3979). LUCIEN NEUWIRTH MADE IT A TRIO. COVERAGE OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE WAS MINIMAL AND WAS BURIED IN MOST NEWS STORIES ON THE CARTER-GISCARD EXCHANGE. CHIRAC IS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID REFUSAL TO GRANT CONCORDE LANDING RIGHTS AT NEW YORK WOULD BE "DISCRIMINATORY, PROTECTIONIST AND CONTRARY TO UNCLASSIFIED

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INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS". HOWEVER, HE SAID, RPR WAS PLEASED THAT GISCARD HAD RAISED CONCORDE PROBLEMS WITH PRESIDENT CARTER AND THAT VERY CLOSE CONTACTS WERE ESTABLISHED AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

10. PRESS MAKES MENTION IN PASSING OF AIR FRANCE AND BRITISH AIRWAYS DECISION AS RESULT CARTER-GISCARD EXCHANGE TO REQUEST FURTHER POSTPONEMENT OF HEARING IN THEIR NEW YORK LAWSUIT AGAINST PORT AUTHORITY.
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